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ABSTRACT

This study compared the professional expectations of graduate students in speech and language pathology (SLP) with the employment realities offered by the profession. A total of 89 graduate students enrolled in the SLP program at Valdosta State University (VSU) in Georgia during 1995-97 completed a seven-item questionnaire on employment prospects. The results were compared to national data on employment prospects and attitudes. The study found that SLP students at VSU indicated an overwhelming interest in working in the South, and that students expected an average annual salary approximately $6,000 more than the national average for entry-level positions in the profession. In job satisfaction comparisons, VSU students placed their emphasis on job nature and efficiency aspects of future employment, compared to the national preferences of friendly co-workers, helpful co-workers, and friendly supervision. It was recommended that SLP program planners encourage students to have a somewhat more realistic idea of their future profession. An appendix provides statistical tables and a copy of the questionnaire. (MDM)

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Running head: EMPLOYMENT MYTHS AND REALITIES

Employment Myths and Realities in Speech and Language Pathology

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Employment Myths and Realities in Speech and Language Pathology

Many students enrolled in educational programs have little knowledge of the realities of the professional field. Their focus in school is mainly on academics. Many of them are shocked when they finally leave school and have to face the real world which is quite different from their expectations.

The purpose of this study is to compare the professional expectations of graduate students in the field of speech and language pathology (SLP) with the employment realities offered by the profession. Although extensive research has been devoted to examining the opportunities available within the field of speech and language pathology, little documentation has been found concerning expectations of prospective professionals within the profession. Therefore, the educational significance of this investigation is to assist the graduate clinicians in arriving at more realistic career expectations.

Research Question

How are the expectations different from the reported realities in the employment trends among speech and language pathology graduate students at Valdosta State University?

Specifically, this study is designed to seek answers for the following questions:

(1) Is there a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP employment setting?

(2) Is there a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP length of service?

(3) Is there a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP client population?

(4) Is there a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP geographical serving areas?

(5) Is there a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the caseload percentage of SLP disorder/diagnosis?

(6) Is there a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the basic annual salary of SLP?

(7) Are the job satisfaction factors of SLP realities different from those of the SLP expectations?

Definition of Terms

Speech and Language Pathology (SLP). Speech and language pathology is the study of speech, language, and voice disorders for the purposes of diagnosis and treatment.

Speech and Language Pathologist. A speech and language pathologist is an individual with a degree and/or certification in speech and language pathology who is qualified to diagnose speech, language, and voice disorders and to prescribe and implement therapeutic measures.

American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA). ASHA is a national professional organization in the study of speech, language and hearing pathology.

Employment settings. Employment setting in this study includes hospital, public school, residential health care facility, non-residential health care facility and private practice.

Employment realities. Employment realities refer to the latest available data on the actual happenings in the SLP profession. In this study, employment setting, length of service, client

population, geographical areas, caseloads of disorder/diagnosis, salaries and job satisfaction factors have been identified as items of interest.

Graduate student expectations. For the convenience of comparison, the same seven areas examined in the employment realities are also listed as survey items of graduate student expectations.

Review of Related Literature

Studies related to specific comparisons between the employment opportunities and expectations of graduate students in the field of speech and language pathology were not found. A number of studies have been conducted to identify the current employment trends within the field. The focus of such studies included: locale, employment setting, population, salary, and job satisfaction.

Locale

A survey by Bello (1994) disclosed that the majority of SLP professionals were employed in the South, followed by the Midwest, the West and the Northeast. The state with the greatest number of certified speech and language pathologists per 100,000 residents was New Mexico, followed by Vermont and Connecticut. The state with the least was Alabama, followed by South Carolina and Mississippi.

Employment setting

According to the Omnibus Survey (Slater, 1995a), more than half (53%) of the speech and language pathologists identified the public school as their primary employment facility. Hospitals represented the next largest employer at 14%, followed by residential health care facilities (12%) and nonresidential facilities (11.5%). Those in private practice comprised 4% of those surveyed.

Population

The Omnibus Survey (Slater, 1995a) revealed that the majority of speech-language pathologists (33.5%) worked with the 6 to 11 age group, followed by the 65 to 84 (21.7%) and 3 to 5 (20.9%) age groups. The survey respondents reported an average caseload of 41 individuals. In addition, the most frequent communication disorder treated was childhood language disorders (26% of caseload) followed by articulation (25.5%) and dysphagia (14%). This was in agreement with the results of a previous ASHA survey (Slater, 1992).

Salary

Slater (1995b) conducted a survey on the median basic annual salaries of certified speech-language pathologists. The starting salary for speech-language pathologists on an academic year basis was $27,520 and $34,000 on a calendar year basis. The highest per academic year salary ($46,000) was offered in the Northeast whereas the highest per calendar year salary ($42,765) was offered in the West.

Job satisfaction

Pezzei and Oratio (1991) studied job satisfaction in the SLP profession and found that more speech and language pathologists employed in health care settings were dissatisfied with their employment than those who worked in schools or private practice. Having friendly co-workers was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction. Other important facets of employment included having enough help to get the job done and working with a friendly supervisor.

Summary

The review of related literature provided a profile of the employment trends within the profession of speech and language pathology. As a summary of the literature reports, a typical

speech and language pathologist works in the public school system, resides in the south and deals mostly with childhood language disorders. Her annual salary for the academic year (9 months) is $27,500 and the variable that most effected job satisfaction was working in the company of friendly co-workers. This profile proved useful when devising an instrument to measure student expectations.

Hypotheses

Nondirectional Hypothesis

Based on the research questions, the hypotheses of this study are derived in the following:

(1) There is a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP employment setting.

(2) There is a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP length of service.

(3) There is a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP client population.

(4) There is a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP geographical serving areas.

(5) There is a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the caseload percentage of SLP disorder/diagnosis.

(6) There is a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the basic annual salary of SLP.

(7) The job satisfaction factors of SLP realities are different from those of the SLP expectations.

Null Hypotheses

Based on the research hypotheses, the null hypotheses of this study are listed in the following:

(1) There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP employment setting.

(2) There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP length of service.

(3) There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP client population.

(4) There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP geographical serving areas.

(5) There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the caseload percentage of SLP disorder/diagnosis.

(6) There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the basic annual salary of SLP.

(7) The job satisfaction factors of SLP realities are not different from those of the SLP expectations.

Methods and Procedures

Subjects

This study involved the graduate students of the SLP Program at Valdosta State University (VSU) in the academic years of 1995-96 and 1996-97. The enrollment of graduate students in The Department of Special Education at Valdosta State University for a degree in

Speech and Language Pathology averages about 70 students a year. The majority of the students are female (97%) and Caucasian (80%). This statistic is consistent with their representation in the profession. A total of 89 students participated in the survey. 49 of them were enrolled in the Winter Quarter and 40 enrolled in the Summer Quarter of 1996.

Instrumentation

Since no previous instrument was devised to survey the SLP student expectations, the researchers came up with an instrument of their own. The instrument consists of seven questions relating to employment setting, length of service, client population, geographical areas, caseloads of disorder/diagnosis, salaries and job satisfaction. To facilitate comparison with the realities, three previous reality surveys in SLP (Slater, 1995a, Slater, 1995b and Pezzi & Oratio, 1991) were brought in as references to design the survey questionnaire. The format and language of the questions in this survey are straight forward and have been written to reflect the same themes as those of Slater and Pezzi & Oratio. The instrument was pilot tested with graduate students and revision was made to accommodate valid responses for research.

Procedures and Analyses.

The SLP graduate students of 1995-96 and 1996-97 were selected to participate in this study. Surveys were conducted in the Winter Quarter of 1996 and the Summer Quarter of 1996 with 19 and 40 responses respectively. Therefore, a total of 89 SLP graduate students in VSU were actually involved in the study.

The student expectation data of employment setting, length of service, client population, geographical areas, and disorder/diagnosis caseloads were compared to reality data stated in the Slater (1995a) report. Chi Square statistical procedure was used for the analyses. The result of

the analyses would indicate if the student expectations differed significantly from the observed realities. All Chi Square testings were statistically established at .05 level of significance.

Information concerning SLP salary realities was found in the Slater (1995b) report which was used as a basis for comparing to student salary expectations. A statistical t-test was used to measure the reality and expectation differences at .05 significance level.

For job satisfaction, student expectation data were compared to reality data supplied by Pezzi and Oratio in the 1991 research findings. Because of the scale difference between the two sets of data, the employment of any statistically procedure for comparison is inappropriate. It was decided that the preferences of job satisfaction factors could be determined by examining the frequencies of the two sets of data.

Findings

As a result of the use of Chi Square method of analyses and the t-test procedure, the data collected in this study were statistically analyzed. The findings of this study were displayed in the following:

(1) Employment setting:

The student expectation data were compared to the observed reality data in employment setting. A Chi Square value of 12.09 with 5 degrees of freedom was significant at .05 level (see Table 2). Substantial differences were found in two categories: hospital and school. The reality data showed 33.7% higher than the expectation data in hospital and 43.2% lower than the expectation data in school (see Table 1).

(2) Length of Service:

The three categories of length of service were examined in terms of student expectations and observed realities by using Chi Square method of analysis. Statistics in Table 2 indicated that a Chi Square value of 5.355 with 2 degrees of freedom was not significant at .05 level. However, the expectation data showed substantial gain over the reality data in calendar year category but loss over the reality data in the school year category (see Table 1).

(3) Client population:

Table 2 showed the result of a Chi Square test comparing the student expectations with the observed realities in seven categories of client population. The Chi Square value of 2.883 at 6 degrees of freedom did not support any significant findings at .05 level. Nevertheless, substantial differences were observed in at least two categories. The expectation data were 13.8% lower than the reality data in the 6-11 year old but were 21.5% higher than the reality data in the 22-64 year old (see Table 1).

(4) Geographical areas:

A Chi Square test was performed to see if there was any significant difference between the student expectations and the realities in the choice of geographical areas. The Chi Square value of 280.139 indicated the difference to be highly significant (see Table 2). This was mostly caused by the concentrated preference of the student expectations towards working in the South (see Table 1).

(5) Caseloads of disorder/diagnosis:

Twelve categories of SLP disorder/diagnosis were involved in the percentage comparison between the student expectations and the realities. The result of the Chi Square analysis showed a

non-significant Chi Square value of 13.399 with 11 degrees of freedom at .05 level (see Table 2). The only prominent difference was observed in childhood language disorders in favor of the reality data (see Table 1).

(6) Salary:

The student salary expectations were compared with the salaries in reality. A t-test was employed to analyze the difference. The result of the test yielded a t-value of 4.02 which was not significant at the .05 level (See Table 3), even though the expectation data were higher in both categories of comparison (see Table 1).

(7) Job satisfaction:

An examination of the Summary of All Statistical Testings (Table 1) showed that friendly co-workers, helpful co-workers and friendly supervisor were the three most important job satisfaction factors according to the reality data whereas the expectation data indicated challenging work, interesting work and enough help to get the job done as most important job satisfaction factors.

Conclusion

The evidence generated by this study, though not conclusive, have lent support to the following statements:

(1) Student expectations are significantly different from the realities in employment setting, geographical areas and job satisfaction in the SLP program of Valdosta State University.

(2) Student expectations are not significantly different from the realities in the length of service, client population, disorder/diagnosis caseloads and salary in the SLP program of Valdosta State University.

Conclusions can be drawn in each of the seven areas of comparison with reference to the null hypotheses.

(1) Employment setting:

Since significant difference was found between the student expectations and realities in employment setting at .05 level, the null hypothesis, "There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP employment setting." is rejected.

(2) Length of Service:

The null hypothesis, "There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP length of service" is accepted because the Chi Square analysis did not yield any significant result at .05 level.

(3) Client population:

The Chi Square analysis did not result in any significant difference between the student expectations and the realities at .05 level. This leads to the acceptance of the null hypothesis, "There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP client population."

(4) Geographical areas:

"There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in SLP geographical serving areas." is the null hypothesis rejected at the .05 level because a significant difference was found in the Chi Square analysis.

(5) Caseloads of SLP disorder/diagnosis:

The difference between the student expectations and the realities was examined by Chi Square analysis yielding a non-significant finding in support of the null hypothesis,"There is not a

significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the caseload percentage of SLP disorder/diagnosis."

(6) Salary:

The salary difference between the student expectations and the realities was analyzed by the t-test procedure indicating a non-significant t-value at .05 level. The null hypothesis,"There is not a significant difference between the students' expectations and the realities in the basic annual salary of SLP" is accepted.

(7) Job satisfaction:

Descriptive statistics have displayed the students' choice of "challenging work", "interesting work" and "enough help to get the job done" as the most important factor to job satisfaction. This is totally different from the three factors shown in realities: "friendly co-workers", "helpful co-workers" and "friendly supervisor". Rejection or acceptance of null hypothesis is not necessary since no statistical analysis was performed.

Discussion

In examining the findings of this study, the following interesting points drew the attention of the researchers:

(1) SLP students in Valdosta State University indicated an overwhelming interest in working in the south. It would be really interesting to see if similar regional preferences be taken by SLP students towards their own region in the north, mid-west and the west.

(2) The findings in this study indicated that VSU students expected an average annual salary to be $6,000 more than the national average. At the same time, most of the students also chose to work in hospitals which pay substantially higher than schools. When all these pieces of

information are put together, it is easy to misunderstand the students' tendency towards placing economic benefit as their top priority.

(3) In job satisfaction comparison, the national preferences of "friendly co-workers", "helpful co-workers" and "friendly supervision" point to a culture of employer-employee cooperation and collaboration. On the other hand, VSU students placed their emphasis on the job nature and efficiency aspects of future employment. The difference in viewpoints could be traced back to the national survey which included both veteran and beginning pathologists. Quite the contrary, all the SLP students in this study were beginners who had basically limited practical field experiences.

Recommendations

This comparative study of SLP student expectations and realities have indicated significant differences in three of the seven analyses. However, in some of the non-significant comparisons, substantial differences were obvious. It is important that SLP students be knowledgeable of the current status of the SLP profession so that they will be professionally prepared to face the challenges of reality. It is recommended that the Speech and Language Pathology program planners continue to work on encouraging students to update their files of current happenings in Speech and Language Pathology.

Need for Further Research

(1) A limitation of this study was to compare Georgia data with national data and make reasonable sense out of it. An involvement of the same study with more states will allow a more panoramic view of the whole picture.

(2) Another equal status study will be to compare the deviations of SLP student expectations and realities between states. The causes of deviations could also be analyzed.

(3) It is also interesting to examine the size of the SLP graduate programs as a factor that contributes to the deviation of student expectations and realities.

(4) This is a very initial study of the SLP student expectations and realities. The research design has been kept simple and straight forward. As the study continues to go more indepth, a more sophisticated research design needs to be structured. In addition, the measuring instrument needs to be revised to reflect more of the same format as the national survey.

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Appendices

* Table 1 Summary of All Statistical Testings
* Table 2 Summary of Chi-Square Analyses
* Table 3 Summary of t-test analysis
* Table 4 Descriptive Statistics
* SLP Graduate Student Questionnaire

Speech-Language-Pathology Graduate Student Survey, Valdosta State University, Georgia

Table 1 Summary of all statistical testings

Questions	Realities(%)	Expectation(%)	Test Values
1 (A)	57.3	23.6	
1 (B)	14.1	57.3	
1 (C)	11.6	4.5	
1 (D)	11.5	7.9	
1 (E)	2.3	2.2	
1 (F)	3.2	4.5	
Chi Square			**12.09**
2 (A)	54.8	77.5	
2 (B)	44.8	16.9	
2 (C)	0.4	5.6	
Chi Square			5.355
3 (A)	4.5	11.4	
3 (B)	20.9	14.4	
3 (C)	33.5	19.7	
3 (D)	8.2	5.3	
3 (E)	2.6	5.3	
3 (F)	8.8	30.3	
3 (G)	21.7	13.6	
Chi Square			2.883
4 (A)	24.5	2.3	
4 (B)	30.7	96.6	
4 (C)	19.6	0.0	
4 (D)	25.2	1.1	
Chi Square			**280.139**
5 (A)	12.4	17.5	
5 (B)	8.3	4.9	
5 (C)	25.5	16.8	
5 (D)	5.4	9.0	
5 (E)	4.3	1.0	
5 (F)	6.0	18.9	
5 (G)	8.6	4.9	
5 (H)	14.0	9.0	
5 (I)	3.4	2.0	
5 (J)	4.2	2.8	
5 (K)	4.0	3.5	
5 (L)	26.0	9.8	
Chi Square			13.399

Questions	Realities ($)	Expectation ($)	Test Value
6 (A)	27520	32333	
6 (B)	34000	42000	
t-test			4.02

Questions	Realties(point)	Expectation(point)	
7 (A)	[redacted]	2.20	
7 (B)	[redacted]	2.50	
7 (C)	[redacted]	2.20	
7 (D)	3.96	2.10	
7 (E)		[redacted]	
7 (F)		2.10	
7 (G)	4.72	2.50	
7 (H)	4.14	[redacted]	
7 (I)	3.62	2.00	
7 (J)	5.26	3.00	
7 (K)		2.00	
7 (L)		2.30	
7 (M)		[redacted]	
7 (N)		2.00	
7 (O)	5.03	1.90	

Footnotes:

* Shaded areas indicate the students' priority preferences.
* Bold typed statistics indicate areas of significant differences at .05 level
* Because of a difference in the data scale, no statistical comparison was performed in Question 7.

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Table 2 Summary of Chi-Square Analyses

Questions	Test Value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	12.090	5	0.034
2	5.355	2	0.069
3	2.883	6	0.823
4	280.139	3	0.000
5	13.399	11	0.268

Table 3 T-Test (Paired Samples)

	Mean	S. D.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
EX6 - RE6	6406.5	2253.549	4.02	1	0.155

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
EX1	6	2.2	57.3	16.667	21.360
EX2	3	5.6	77.5	33.333	38.665
EX3	7	5.3	30.3	14.286	8.719
EX4	4	0	96.6	25.000	47.743
EX5	12	1	18.9	8.342	6.338
EX6	2	32333	42000	37166.500	6835.601
RE1	6	2.3	57.3	16.667	20.483
RE2	3	0.4	54.8	33.333	28.956
RE3	7	2.6	33.5	14.314	11.309
RE4	4	19.6	30.7	25.000	4.544
RE5	12	3.4	26	10.175	8.008
RE6	2	27520	34000	30760.000	4582.052

SLP GRADUATE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a survey to gather information regarding the professional expectations of graduate students in speech-language pathology as part of an educational research project. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Please read each question carefully and circle your response. Answer each question based on your employment plans. Unless otherwise indicated, please choose only one answer.

Date you plan to graduate: _____

Questions:

1. What setting do you plan to work in:
   - A. School
   - B. Hospital
   - C. Residential health care facility
   - D. Nonresidential health care facility
   - E. Private practice
   - F. Other

2. In what capacity do you expect to be employed:
   - A. Full-time (calendar year)
   - B. 9-10 months (school year)
   - C. Part-time

3. Which age population do you plan to work with:
   - A. Birth- 2 years
   - B. 3-5 years
   - C. 6-11 years
   - D. 12-17 years
   - E. 18-21 years
   - F. 22-64 years
   - G. 65 and older

4. Which area of the country do you plan to work in:
   - A. Northeast
   - B. South
   - C. West
   - D. Midwest

5. Which disorder/diagnosis do you think will comprise the majority of your caseload:
   A. Aphasia
   B. Apraxia
   C. Articulation/phonological disorders
   D. Degenerative neurological disorders
   E. Disorders resulting from autism
   F. Disorders resulting from TBI
   G. Dysarthria
   H. Dysphagia
   I. Fluency disorders
   J. Hearing disorders
   K. Voice disorders
   L. Other childhood language disorders

6. Identify the basic annual salary you expect to receive in your professional employment (after attaining your Certificate of Clinical Competency):

7. Number (in order of most important to least important) the three factors you feel will have the greatest bearing on your professional job satisfaction:
   A. Friendly co-workers
   B. Helpful co-workers
   C. Friendly supervisor
   D. Clearly defined responsibilities
   E. Challenging work
   F. Good fringe benefits
   G. Fair hiring of personal for advanced positions
   H. Enough help to get the job done
   I. Enough time to get the job done
   J. Chances to make friends
   K. Good job security
   L. Good hours
   M. Interesting work
   N. Freedom in deciding how to do work
   O. Supervisor who is concerned about the welfare of those under her